

Judges

1. Tribal Conquest and Spiritual Adultery 1:1-3:6

With Joshua's death, much of the land remains to be conquered.

In 1:1-2 one tribe, Judah, stands out and is (largely successful) in battle.

However the other tribes were less successful: see the failures listed in 1:27-36.

Read 2:1-4 and 11-14

In 2:1-4 What have the Israelites largely failed to do? What is so serious about this?

In 11-14 What are the consequences of this failure?

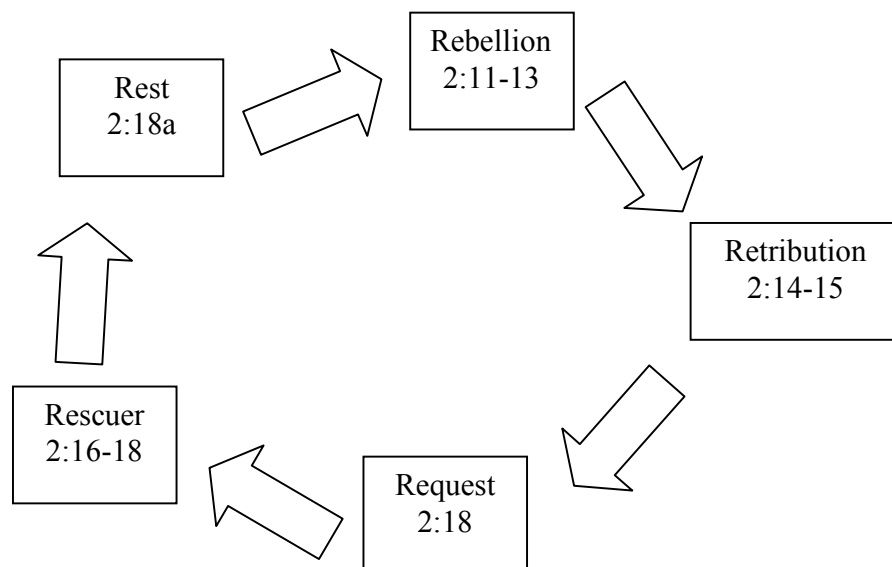
What picture do you get of spiritual life in Israel in those days? Are they all atheists?

What parallels are there between the Israelites' situation and ours?

In what ways is the church in danger of 'Canaanisation'?

2. The Cycle of Judges

The leaders of Israel after Joshua were referred to as 'Judges'. They were not so much judges as we use the term, but military leaders.



This pattern is worked out time and time again. Othniel is the 'example Judge': Rebellion: 2:7, Retribution 2:8, Request 2:9, Rescuer 2:9-10, Rest 2:11

Discuss: In what way does this cycle point us forward to Christ?
In what way is he like the Judges and in what ways does he surpass them?

3. Such a Strange Salvation! 3:7 - 16:31

There are 12 Judges in total, but 6 major ones. Each of them rescues God's people in a surprising way, or is an unlikely character. Deborah was a woman, Gideon a timid youth who is cowering from the enemy when called, Jephthah a non-pure Israelite who ends up sacrificing his own daughter, Samson a sex-addict muscle man. Perhaps the funniest, and comfortably my favourite, is **Ehud**.

Read 3:12-30

- Don't mess with God's people or you'll become the butt of his jokes!
- God's salvation comes from surprising places.

Discuss: How might this extraordinary story in some way point us forward to Jesus and the Gospel? (Try Colossians 2:15 for one idea)

The 'cycle' of Judges is actually a downward spiral: each rotation gets worse.

Ch 4-5 Deborah and Barak: embarrassingly for Israel and her leadership it takes a woman to persuade the men to go to war. But there is rest for forty years 5:31.

Ch 6-8 Gideon: Is fearful and doubting of his call 6:11ff, but does rescue Israel through very few troops.

Read Judges 7: 15-22 Who really wins the battle? How is this rescue of Israel like God's later rescue through Jesus?

Although Gideon sets up a false worship system, there is rest for 40 years, 8:28

Ch 10-12 Jephthah

Rebellion again, 10:6, Retribution 10:7-9, Request 10:10-15 but this time they have to ask twice, Jephthah does fight for them, but is never called a 'deliverer', and what is missing from 12:7, Jephthah's death? Jephthah sacrifices his daughter after a rash vow

Ch 13-16 Samson

Rebellion in 13:1, Retribution in 13:2, then ???
13:5 Samson will *begin* to deliver Israel, and at his death again there is no 'rest'. The cycle is spiralling downwards.

What do these facts tell us about the state of Israel's worship?

What do they tell us about God's grace?

If you were reading the story of Samson to a child, how might you explain the significance of his death and what we are meant to learn from it now?

4. A Terrible Ending 17:1-21:5

Samson brings the stories of the Judges to an end, but here are 3 more chapters where Israel sinks further and further into sin and apostasy. There are stories of rape, mutilation, idolatry and civil war. A book that begins with a marriage and war against the enemy finishes with a rape and civil war. There has been a terrible downward spiral. Why?

Discuss

Look up the repeated phrase in 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25.

What is the problem, and what is the cause?

Now that we have a king, there are two real dangers that face us:

Individualism:

Doing as *I* see fit, not as Jesus does.

E.g.

Syncretism:

Not abandoning God altogether but mixing him in with some other beliefs.

E.g.

5. The Need for the right King: Judges 9

Gideon, having refused to be king, then calls his son Abimelech, which means ‘My Father is King’. He is the first king of Israel.

What are we meant to think of Abimelech?

9:5 cf 1:5-7 →

9:14-15 cf Gen 3:18 →

9:52-3 cf Gen 3:15 (Judges 4:17-21) →

The next major book, Samuel, tells of the search for the King. The first candidate is:

Saul: Like **Animilech**, He is plagued by an evil spirit from God, and forced to commit suicide at the hands of a armour-bearer (Judges 9:23, 9:54-5, 1 Sam 31:4-6).

Like **Jephthah** he makes a rash vow that calls for the life of his child, and sends out a dismembered warning (Jdg 11:30-40, 1 Samuel 14, Jdg 19:29-30, 1Sam 11:7)

Like the murdering, raping **Benjaminites**, Saul is from the tribe of Benjamin.

→ Saul is too like the worst of the Judges who preceded him.

David however is a Judahite, who will fight to rescue Israel.

Note the significance of the details in 1 Sam 17: 5, 33, 49, 51

The Ideal Deliverer

Passage	He will...
2:7, 12, 4:1 etc	
2:30, 5:31 etc	
2:11, 4:1, 6:33	
3:15, 4:4, 6:11	
1:2-19, 3:9	Be from Judah?
Abimilech	Be appointed by God, not self-appointed
Whole Book	Unite God’s people rather than divide them

